

Rep. Delahunt stresses need for Congress to wait for facts

By Christine Hansen
Medill News Service

WASHINGTON — As a member of the House Judiciary committee, U.S. Rep. William Delahunt, D-Quincy, could have a role in the future of the presidency. That's all the more reason, he said, to stay focused on the facts and avoid speculation.

Whether he was shocked about President Clinton's reported testimony that he had an "improper physical relationship" with former White House intern, Monica Lewinsky, was not an issue for Delahunt.

If independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr does file a report with Congress about his seven-month investigation of the president, it will be up to the Judiciary Committee to decide what will happen next.

Delahunt said he will wait until he is presented with all of the facts. He

is most concerned about the quality and credibility of the report.

"Our role is to be there if a report should be transmitted to our committee," Delahunt said from his home in Quincy last night, adding that he has avoided speaking to the media about the issue or appearing on television talk shows.

"If the American people want to ensure that our regulatory institutions are respected and that our integrity is preserved, then I should not breach my responsibility as a judiciary committee member," he said.

Delahunt also said he did not expect he would be watching last night when the president addressed the nation about his testimony.

"I will not speculate and I have not speculated about what is going to happen," Delahunt said. "What he (Clinton) says during the address, with respect to my role as a member of the Judiciary committee, is irrelevant."

Delahunt prepares for role in possible impeachment

By **DAVID McPHERSON**
STAFF WRITER

As Monica Lewinsky testified to a grand jury yesterday, U.S. Rep. William Delahunt said he understands the historic significance of his potential role in the investigation of President Clinton.

As a member of the House Judiciary Committee, Delahunt would participate in any impeachment hearings that might result from the special prosecutor's investigation of Clinton.

For that reason, Cape Cod's freshman congressman said he refuses to prejudge allegations against the president.

"It would be unfair not just to the individuals involved, but to our democratic institutions," he said. "I think the American people expect more from the Judiciary Committee."

The Quincy Democrat indicated he and



REP. WILLIAM DELAHUNT
Democratic member of Judiciary Committee may play key part in hearings.

potential historic role that we might be called upon to play," Delahunt said from his Capitol Hill office.

Two other Massachusetts Democrats

other Judiciary Committee members are preparing for hearings in case independent counsel Kenneth Starr sends a report to Congress.

"I think we're all very much aware of the

serve on the Judiciary Committee with him: Reps. Barney Frank of Newton and Martin Meehan of Lowell.

In March, Roll Call, a weekly newspaper that covers Congress, said Delahunt could be a key player in impeachment hearings.

"While Democrats view the veteran prosecutor as a skilled interrogator who could pick apart unfounded allegations against the president, Republicans think

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Delahunt is the one Democrat they can work with," Roll Call said.

Before Delahunt was elected to Congress in 1996, he served as Norfolk County district attorney for 20 years.

Delahunt said he has discussed the possible hearings several times with the Judiciary Committee's Republican chairman, Henry J. Hyde of Illinois, as well as other Democrats on the panel.

After yesterday's interview, Delahunt was scheduled to meet House Minority Leader Dick Gephardt and other Democratic House freshmen to discuss the potential hearings.

Delahunt said there are many unanswered questions about how hearings might proceed.

"This is something to date Congress has had nothing to do with. If a report should come to us, there are no guidelines. It's very vague and very nebulous."

Throughout the interview, Delahunt stressed hearings on Starr's investigation are only a possibility.

To maintain his impartiality, Delahunt said, he has turned down invitations to appear on all of the Sunday morning network news shows to discuss the allegations against Clinton.

"To speculate is something that should be avoided," he said.

Delahunt's strongest statement on Starr's investigation came in February, when he wrote to the special prosecutor saying Starr should consider resigning because

he had lost public confidence.

At that time, Delahunt said he was not commenting on the substance of Starr's investigation, just on the public confidence issue.

To prepare himself for possible hearings, Delahunt said, he has contacted lawyers he knows from his days as district attorney to ask them to consider serving as his advisers. He declined to name the individuals, but a number of his former assistant district attorneys have gone on to prominent positions in the legal system.

"I think it's important to take advantage of the fact that during my career as a prosecutor I was able to develop relationships with some of the best and brightest people in the profession," Delahunt said.

Democrats on the Judiciary Committee already have hired two staff members to prepare for potential impeachment hearings and are interviewing candidates for chief counsel and deputy counsel.

Since joining the House Judiciary Committee in early 1997, Delahunt said, he has developed a close professional and personal relationship with Hyde, the Republican chairman who has served in the House for 25 years.

"If there should be proceedings, his legacy will be defined by how he and other members of the Judiciary Committee conduct themselves during the course of those proceedings."

Though Starr's investigation of

the president is now reaching its apex, Delahunt said any congressional hearings are unlikely until early next year.

The House is set to recess today until September and then will wrap up this year's session in early October.

"In my opinion, there is clearly inadequate time for this Congress to address the issues that may or may not be presented in the Starr report, if there is a report," Delahunt said.

Judiciary Committee members would likely take their time reviewing any report from Starr.

"This is a report that nobody, Republican or Democrat, would simply accept and reach conclusions on. We have an independent obligation to proceed in a fair and impartial manner," Delahunt said.